

Meeting 1 March 16 2015, Corsham Court. Introductory.

Attending: Tanvir Bush, Maggie Gee (chairing), Emma Geen, Beatrice Hitchman, Alison Lee, Ella Simpson, Bambo Soyinka, Gerard Woodward (4 members of staff and 4 Ph D students: 6 creative writing practitioners, 1 social scientist, 1 neuroscientist.)

We began by NOT defining empathy - an apparent intellectual necessity to which Emma Geen, rightly, later referred. However Bambo Soyinka and I had discovered in our preliminary meetings that even 2 people can't easily agree on a definition, therefore decided we did not want our first group meeting to be taken up on tussles over the exact interpretation of the word. In our view we are all linked by an interest in the subject as understood in popular parlance. We might each define it slightly differently - that is interesting in itself, but the differences won't stop us having a meeting of minds. As Aristotle said - and this seems to me to have something to do with empathy? - 'It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.'

Then each person present gave a resume of the relevance and meaning of empathy in their own discipline and their own practice. MG gave a digest of the recent (post-1980s) history of empathy, culminating in an account of Castaneo and Comer Kidd's influential paper 'Reading Literary Fiction improves Theory of Mind', *Science*, October 2013, which produced a lot of extra-scientific media coverage, eg *Sunday Times*, *Guardian*, and which has been referenced in many subsequent meetings.